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ABSTRACT

The literature related to affective development in preschool children is reviewed, and suggestions for enhancing cognitive skills through affective activities are given. Considered are the rationale for early intervention, problems in affective development, parent involvement, and the benefits of early stimulation. Suggestions for enhancing affective development concern selection of target behaviors and reinforcers, the use of verbal praise, and the value of imaginative play. An intensive program of affective development is seen to have such results as improved social skills, a more positive self concept, and a reduction in transitional problems when the children enter public school. (DB)

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ENHANCING COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AFFECTIVE ACTIVITIES

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Introduction

The relationship between affective experiences and cognitive development is gaining increased attention by researchers. While the precise relationship is unclear and open to empiricial scrutiny, there is general agreement among some authorities that satisfactory emotional experiences will increase the acquisition of the unique skills required for successful learning and living in our society.

Henry C. Lindgren (1976) states that in the past,

> We thought that education was purely an intellectual or cognitive experience, that emotions and feelings had no place in the classroom, but the evidence that the affective side of life - emotions and feelings - cannot be excluded is now overwhelming. A child will not learn as long as he does not want to learn, sees no sense in learning, or is preoccupied with other problems. (pp. 61-62)

According to Spodek (1972)

> A child's motivation to perform academic tasks is closely related to the response he receives from his enviornment. If he is not expected to perform well, chances are he will not be motivated to perform well in that situation. (p. 297)

Many minority group children who experience difficulty in school are from non-stimulating environments and are labeled as psychosocially deprived, slow learners, borderline or educable mentally retarded. Available evidence indicates that these children enter first grade with a poor self concept, inadequate performance on standardized tests, short attention span, negative

attitude toward authority, significant language deficits and other basic problems.

A pioneer study concerned with emergence of racial identification and the development of self awareness among young children was conducted by Clark and Clark (1939). Among the several conclusions drawn from this study was that a definite delimitation of the self occurs between ages three and four years. The results of this study have raised some pertinent questions and generated further research which extends beyond the realm of mere speculation. It also provides some support for the notion that curriculum planners should be more responsive to the affective needs of minority preschool children who come from non-stimulating and impoverished environments.

The importance of affective aspects of learning which includes attitudes, values, personal responsibility, motivation, and a healthy self-concept is recognized as one of the distinct themes reflected in a variety of innovations in special education. (Safford, 1978, p. 272).

Any preconceived notions teachers have about children who differ from them socioeconomically, racially, or ethnically will consciously or unconsciously affect their reactions to the children. These reactions could result in hostility, denial, or patronizing behaviors that affect both the minority group children's attitudes towards themselves and other children's reactions to them. (Samuels, 1977, p. 236)

Teachers of non-white preschool handicapped children should consider most seriously the importance of creating a wholesome affective environment. Palmer, (1970, p. 61) is of the opinion that failure to learn to handle affective functioning during the early years may later appear in adult life as a severe neurotic disability.

Early attention to affective needs will minimize emotional problems of young children and thereby enable them to develop their varied intellectual

capacities. The major focus in the preacademic program for handicapped children centers on affective, cognitive and psychomotor activities. The present emphasis in this paper, however, centers on enhancing cognitive development through affective activities. Implications are drawn from published research, structured observations and direct contact with a group of ten preschool children enrolled in an early childhood education center.

Rationale for Early Intervention

In responding to the question, is Early Intervention Effective? Bronfenbrenner (1974) provides a report on longitudinal evaluations of preschool programs. With particular reference to the first three years of life he states:

> During this period the primary objective is the establishment of an enduring emotional relationship between parents and infant involving frequent reciprocal interaction around activities which are challenging to the child. The effect of such interaction is to strengthen the bond between parent and child, enhance motivation, increase the frequency and power of contingent responses, produce mutual adaptation in behavior, and thereby improve the parent's effectiveness as a teacher for the child, further the latter's learning, and, in due course, establish a stable interpersonal system, capable of fostering and sustaining the child's development in the future. (p. 56).

The foregoing statement provides a compelling reason for early attention to affective behavior of preschool children. To provide a stimulating emotional environment, however, which fosters patterns of affective development which will ultimately result in appropriate affective responses, requires cooperative relationships between the home and school.

In discussing the impact of early school experiences, Hawkes (1968) underscored the importance of building a preschool child's self image and noted that the development of an adequate self image is the function of the teachers, parents, family and other significant persons with whom the young child interacts. (p. 334)

Bronfenbrenner (1975) noted:

> We have no systematic information about effects of intervention programs outside the cognitive realm, and even within that sphere standardized tests of intelligence and achievement are limited in scope and subject to a marked middle-class bias. (p. 450)

Hayden and Edgar (1978) noted that

> The obvious rationale for early intervention is that young children are more amenable to skill acquisition than are older children and that secondary handicapping conditions can possibly be prevented. Although there have been some who have questioned the effects of early intervention, logic dictates that regardless of the reason for intervention, precise, appropriate program is absolutely necessary if any intervention is to be effective. Individualized education programs (IEP's) are a safeguard that is available to insure appropriate planning. (p. 67)

Good education must take a child's affective development into account. Lindgren (1976) maintains that everything that happens in the classroom is in some way related to the emotions of persons participating in the learning situation, thus it is imperative that teachers consider the affective aspects of learning. (pp. 61-62)

A child must develop a strong feeling of self worth in order to function effectively in the classroom milieu and to function successfully with other children. Being able to participate with and enjoy others is paramount to feeling happy and achieving success later in life. All teachers must take a child's affective development into account. An enriching classroom environment and positive reinforcement should help each child develop a healthy personality.

Those children who are most in need of support are the ones who usually show problems and are difficult for teachers to cope with. It is precisely these children who need the most individual help in our schools. (Samuels, 1977, p. 176)

Problems in Affective Development

The most common problem in affective development, according to Palmer, (1970) lies in the extent to which a child can express feelings, to control emotions and in the utilization and assimilation of emotional controls. Affective experiences are rapidly accumulated during infancy. As the child grows and develops conflicts may arise because of societal expectations and parental authority. Opportunities for expression of affective behaviors are often surpressed to avoid emotional outburst. This supression tends to restrict emotional reactions which are characteristic of young children and necessary for affective development. (p. 57)

Hess (1968) questioned whether the experience of the 3 and 4 year old was only of minor significance in the development of adult behavior. He is of the opinion that early education is intertwined with other areas but can be conceptualized as basic socialization. He warned that focus on the cognitive content should not ignore program focus in social and emotional areas. (p. 2)

In commenting on affective development Fowler (1968) conceded that it is a difficult task to ascertain the long-range consequences of different methods and experiences during the early periods of life. He recognized however, that the first years are unquestionably important for the development of cognitive sets and personality-cognitive styles. (p. 35)

Palmer (1970) concluded that:

> The absence of affect or inappropriate affective response in the face of stress is as common a sympton of psychologic disturbance in children as it is among adults. (p. 60)

Parent Involvement

During the early years the young child is exposed to a wide range of conditions which help to shape his/her personality. The family is of crucial importance in learning ways to avoid social disapproval and the development of appropriate affective behaviors. Hence, "faulty parent child relations or abnormal family interactions are vital sources of maladjustments." (Love, 1972)

The efficacy of parental involvement in an early childhood education program is documented in an evaluative report by Bronfenbrenner (1974). The findings revealed that children enrolled in Head Start Programs consistently maintained their gains when parents were systematically involved in the learning process.

Other findings (Shearer and Shearer, 1972), indicated that it is possible to train parents at home to effectively teach their handicapped child. One of the major advantages is that affective behavior can be learned and maintained in the natural environment.

A study conducted by Outland (1977) in rural Macon, Alabama revealed that parent education had a significant effect on pupil achievement in a group of disadvantaged, black first grade students. The findings indicated that the mean verbal achievement test scores of young students whose parents participated in a teacher-involved parent education program nearly doubled those of students whose parents participated in the program but did not benefit from supervised instruction.

In discussing the cooperative relationship between the parents and the school, Kroth (1978) states:

> Hardly any educator would deny the strong influence that the home has on a child's growth and development. In fact, when a child does not learn or misbehaves in the classroom, parental attitudes and behavior are usually highlighted as the major reason. If parental influence is accepted as a potent force in the child behavior that can be for better or for worse, then educators have little choice but to establish a working relationship with parents. (p. 88)

A similar view is expressed by Gordon (1973) who states, "for children to arrive at the highest level of their functioning, parents and school need to work intimately together in a partnership arrangement to provide learning environments, both at home and in the school, that supplement and complement each other." (p. 26)

The organization and expansion of programs in early childhood education require greater involvement than was previously included. Parental attitudes toward the program is a major determinant in whether it will prove successful. It cannot be assumed, however, from the experiences of parents that they will be acquainted with the methods, techniques and procedures for providing for the social and emotional needs of their children.

In conclusion, Strom and Torrance (1973) stated that:

> "The parent role concerns developing interest and motivation and guiding the formation of the self-concept, hopefully in a positive direction." (p. 43)

Strom and Torrance (1973) listed several suggestions for parents to follow in enhancing the affective development of young children.

1. Develop curiosity or the questioning attitude in their child.
2. Parents can make their own values much more explicit to children and give their reasons for having them.
3. Parents can enhance self-concepts and confidence by guiding children to successful accomplishments in whatever activities the child chooses.
4. A major task of parents is to help the child develop individuality.
5. Finally, parents need to provide the atmosphere of psychological safety and support which makes it possible to live amid tensions from many sources. (pp. 43-45)

Focus on Early Stimulation

Efforts are constantly being made to refine the curriculum for the Preschool Program. Essential background information for program planning should be obtained from numerous sources. An appraisal or comparison of preschool curricula, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

While research data is minimal regarding a curriculum model for affective development, the cognitive development models devised by Weikart, 1967; Gray and Klaus, 1968; Karnes, 1969; and Hodges, McCandless, and Spicker, 1971; Lillie, 1975 and others have implications for early stimulation programs for minority preschool children. In most of the models, some attention is given to the social and emotional needs of the children.

An indepth review of several curriculum models (Spicker, 1971) identified some of the variations among preschool programs and pointed to the discouraging findings that "Project Head Start in general had been unsuccessful in increasing the intellectual abilities of disadvantaged or culturally different children. Further, that increase in I.Q. were seldom maintained beyond the second grade. Even more devastating was the finding that Head Start Experience had done little to prevent scholastic failure in the elementary school grades." (p. 629-640)

Despite the discouraging results reported by researchers on the merits of early experiences, efforts are continuing to focus attention on the needs of young children. Of particular concern is the affective needs of black children.

In discussing current curriculum approaches Lillie (1975) notes that the "focus of many programs have changed from one of supporting and nurturing the young child to one of providing for specific educational or developmental needs." (p. 4)

Because of improverished home environment, many minority children have failed to formulate strong special interest and abilities. Thus, it is necessary to expose these children to structured activities during some period of each day. This suggestion, however, is contrary to the notion that highly structured situations tend to stifle creativity in young children.

A number of curricular suggestions and ideas for enhancing self-concept in early childhood have been offered by Samuels (1977). Among the emphases are teachers attitudes, parent participation, and activities related to body image of preschool children. Attention is given to activities and materials which focus on minority group children.

In focusing attention on the affective outcomes of school learning Bloom (1977) states: "a good self-concept is the foundation of a happy and successful life. But the school systematically destroys self-concepts for many children, as early as second grade." Bloom's statement provides further rationale for a systematic plan for the development of desirable patterns of affective behavior.

Available evidence indicates that without adequate emotional support, the black child's self image is impaired at a very early age. A cogent statement by Palmer (1970) lends credence to this notion. He states: "Over the years a child may learn to mask his sensitivity to emotional stimulations, inuring himself against stress, and revealing his anxieties and depression only in behavioral manifestation." (p. 60) It is important to note, however, that these behaviors are not impervious to change.

Since the training procedures have an indirect relationship to learning styles, it is reasonable to assume that whatever the child's style, a positive attitude toward learning will be developed.

Suggestions for Enhancing Affective Development

Educators spend their energies responding to the myriad of behaviors present in the daily functions of a classroom. As a teacher, who is to guide or influence student behavior, one must constantly be aware of the desired behavior that will ensure positive affective development and enhance learning. The importance of establishing a wholesome relationship with young children cannot be overemphasized.

Some strategies and tactics used by teachers are not only ineffecitve but may be harmful to the emotional growth of young children. Therefore, one must carefully decide what behaviors are to be reinforced, and the appropriate reinforcers to be used. Samuels (1977) agrees that the "key to any behavioral change, whether it be in the cognitive or in the affective domain, is to diagnose children's specific weaknesses or strengths and then use appropriate procedures to move them to more adequate levels of functioning." (p. 177)

There are numerous kinds of reinforcers that can be used by teachers. Basically these reinforcers can be classified as social reinforcers and activity reinforcers. In this paper the social reinforcers will include verbal praise, facial expressions, body languages and physical contact. Activity reinforcers will include those rewards that are desirable activities for most children.

Verbal praise is highly desirable in communicating to students the extent to which their behavior is acceptable. Baker (1975) maintains that describing a child's behavior in terms of your appreciation for that particular behavior is important to effective praising. (p. 40) Some suggestive words of praise and appropriate phrases that one might use, include: "Good," "That's Right," "Great," "I knew you could do it," "You really pay attention," and "You have done a lot of work."

McDavid and Garwood (1978) point out that a child who places no value on receiving verbal praise from a particular adult is not likely to view such praise as rewarding. Because of child rearing practices black children, generally do not respond to verbal praise. Thus, other kinds of reinforcers must be utilized.

Acceptable behavior may also be reinforced by facial expressions, such as smiling, winking, establishing eye contact and laughing. As a child performs a desired behavior, the teacher's gesture of approval through a facial expression signifies to the child that his response is correct.

In the process of learning, a child's behavior or ways of reacting to a certain situation, stimulus or action must also be taken into account. Some children may respond to body language or physical contact. Such physical contact or body language as, nodding, cuddling, hugging, touching, stroking arm, patting on the back and holding young children on the lap can also be used to show appreciation for a desired behavior.

Poussaint and Atkins (1970) state that "for many black youth, external rewards are weak motivators of behavior since they are discriminatorily and inconsistently given. The more immediate and direct the reward is, the stronger a motivator it is likely to be." (p. 68) Therefore, one must be selective in using certain reinforcers, because black children traditionally respond more to concrete rewards.

Concrete, consumable rewards such as fruits, cookies, candy, juice, gum, and tangible rewards as money, stars, toys, pencils, and certificates are good motivators for strengthening affective behavior in black children. Johnson (1970) notes that if a child is motivated to achieve by getting social reinforcers such as praise, stars or grades, then the teacher should utilize these reinforcers. (p. 132)

White (1971) emphasized the importance of using stories, painting, sculpting, dioramas and dramatic play with children who have had limited experiences. He believes that children will be more likely to express themselves and develop positive affective behavior. (p. 93)

Activity rewards are also reinforcers for motivating students. A teacher could allow the child to choose something that he likes to do. Finger painting, playing with puppets, listening to music all appeal to the young child. Through varied activities, an effective medium for releasing psychic energy is established; thereby creating an environment in which the development of positive affective growth can occur.

McDavid and Garwood (1978) contend that "Affiliation with others becomes increasingly valued by the child, the promise of acceptance is seen as rewarding and the threat of rejection as punishing." (p. 254)

Thus, proximity can be a rewarding experience for the young child. Included among the suggestions are such activities as sitting with groups, moving around among students, joining in the class activities, and eating with the children.

The suggested rewards are by no means an exhaustive list for the preschool classroom, rather, only a partial listing of reinforcers the teacher might employ in enhancing affective development. With ingenuity and creativity of the teacher and the observed student, many kinds of rewards can be added to such a list.

Summary

The purposes of this article were to review the literature related to affective development, present authoritative opinions, and to offer some suggestions for enhancing cognitive skills through affective activities.

A review of selected literature pertaining to affective development of young children indicated that parents and teachers must assume a cooperative role in the development of a positive self image. It is impossible, however, to estimate the impact of an early stimulation project on the affective development of young children; the ultimate success will depend on the continuing efforts of parents and professionals to reinforce the concepts emphasized during the training program.

The extent to which parents are involved in the program is dependent in a large measure on the person making the contacts. Initial contacts should be made by some person who can establish rapport with the parents, develop an understanding of their problems and points of view. The major responsibility for achieving understanding, however, rests with the program director or coordinator. To assume a productive role in the educative process, parents must increase skills for helping their childrn do better in school.

Early attention to affective development maximizes the likelihood that young children will be openminded, possess positive attitudes toward relationships with others, and toward social institutions.

By using such techniques as positive reinforcers, verbal praise, physical contact, body language, proximity, concrete rewards and activity rewards, it is reasonable to assume that salient aspects of the social and affective environments will facilitate a change in the young child's receptivity toward cognitive tasks.

The anticipated outcomes of an intensive program of affective development include improved social skills, a more positive concept of self, an openminded and receptive attitude toward learning and reduction in transitional problems when children enter public school.

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